Marconi on the War Needs and Ideals of Italy

Wireless Telegraph Inventor Tells How America Can Help His Country—He Thinks Submarine Problem Still Unsolved

SOMETHING of what it meant to the world to have Italy in the war, with a word of explanation as to the purpose of the Italian Mission to this country, was told by Senator William Marconi, a member of that mission, in the course of an interview for The New York Times at Washington. The mission arrived in Washington last week, about ten days ago and will visit New York early next week.

"Our declaration of neutrality on Aug. 31, 1914," said the wireless inventor, "was at the very outset of distinct military advantage to France, because it enabled them to receive something like four hundred thousand troops along her Italian frontier and send them north, where they were so urgently needed to oppose the German advance. But neutrally might continue had this been an ordinary war, waged as civilized nations had been supposed to wage war before Germany demonstrated her own capacity of devastating a neutral country, whose neutrality she herself had guaranteed, her own way of frightfulness, that was unsearchable previous to the Summer of 1914. It was her horror of this thing which the Italians felt in common with the rest of the world, and the traditional resentment of Austria's holding our land, that finally brought my country into the war. It is not fair to Italy to believe that anything less than this, that anything less, was her ruling, dominating motive in joining the Allies.

"To satisfy Italy one of the results of this war must be the restoration of her provinces still under Austrian domination. But, as I already have told you, Italy would have gone into the war if there had been no provisions to resign any independent nation would have done the same thing—America has done it. The difference in time that elapsed between Italy's declaration of war and that of the United States may be accounted for largely by the difference in distance from the horrors of the war.

"As to our technical military problems, Italy has the most difficult Front in Europe. It is 840 kilometers long, and much of it over mountains 10,000 feet in height. To maintain this and to advance our lines, as the Italian armies have been doing very vigorously since the arrival of this mission in America, we have 4,000,000 men under arms at the present time. But at the beginning of our participation, which was at a time when things were not going well with the Allies, (that is significant of our own part,) we were able to send enough men to the frontier to force Austria to divert 300,000 men from her operations against the then retreating Russians.

"Our participation, the Italian participation, at the far moment made the Russian retreat less disastrous than it otherwise would have been. That has been, for the most part, the closing up of the Austro-Serbian line in the north, for which Italy has rendered her allies. She has kept engaged hundreds of thousands of troops who but for Italy would have been available for operations on the west and east fronts. In that way we were an important factor in making possible the advance of Brusiloff.

"And at the same time we helped Russia in another way, which is of great significance. The Adriatic is the first time. We gave her in time for use in the Brusiloff advance 300,000 rifles, millions of cartridges to fit them, and thousands of motor lorries for her transport service. Some of these machines we shipped to direct, whereas they were sent on by way of Archangels. Some were purchased by us in America and sent direct to Russia.

"In connection with this service which Italy had rendered to Russia, Senator Marconi showed the following letter which he had received from the late Earl Kitchener:

"War Office, Satoth December, 1915, Dear Sir, William Marconi: I am glad to learn from your letter of the 6th inst. that you have been as useful in your efforts to organize the manufacture of cartridges for the rifles which you have lent to Russia. General Subin-Radikoff has told me how invaluable your influence and assistance have been, and I thank you most heartily for the great trouble which you have taken in this matter. It is of great value to know that I may rely on further help from you should the occasion arise, and I greatly appreciate your kind offer.

"The question of the shipment of the cartridges from America is being given due attention. It will probably be made to include from Russian supplies from this country. Perhaps it will be more convenient if we communicate directly through the American War Office on this point as soon as we are in a position to make a definite proposal.

"With renewed thanks for all your help, believe yours very truly, (Signed) KITCHENER.

"Our naval situation in this war," resumed Senator Marconi, "is curiously like that of England with reference to the German fleet. It is stronger than that of Austria, but we cannot get at the enemy fleet. It is next to impossible to get it because of the submarines and the lack of available shipping. The danger is that this will eventually handicap us in the event of our going to the coast, for ourselves and our allies and in the railway transportation of troops. We long since cut our passenger train service by 50 per cent. to conserve our railroad resources for freight and soldiers."

Senator William Marconi, Before Coming to America with Italy's Commission, Was on Active Duty in the Army.